

# THE BROKEN COIN

By EMERSON HOUGH (from the Scenario by GRACE CUNARD)  
AUTHOR of "THE LADY and the PIRATE," "JOHN RAWN," ETC.

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## EIGHTH INSTALLMENT

### SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a curio shop half of a broken coin, the mutilated inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the principality of Gretzhoffen to piece out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and on arrival in Gretzhoffen her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin begin.

### CHAPTER XXXII.

"You find it convenient to enter my room once more unasked?" Kitty's eyes flashed in genuine indignation as she faced Count Sachio. "It is not your room, mademoiselle, but ours. We pay for it and have control of it."

"So there was some definite purpose in secreting me here away from my friends?"

"Assuredly, a purpose very definite, and one for which we do not intend to be swerved, mademoiselle."

"What then do you purpose doing with me?"

"We plan taking you before the king—not the king of Gretzhoffen, but our own king, Count Sachio of Grahoffen. He wishes to see you, mademoiselle."

Kitty turned back into the room and Sachio, irritated at the delay, went so far as to take her by the arm to induce her to leave the room with him. She resisted him so vigorously that for the time he stood back nonplused.

But at length the girl's powers proved no match for those brought against her. She was forced from the room toward the front of the building. Once more Kitty adopted the policy of Roleau himself—she ceased to struggle when she found struggling useless, and lay back to wait until a time when resistance might be more effective.

"Very well, gentlemen," said she. "Do as you like. I am weaker than yourselves. Since you are men and gentlemen, naturally you are strong."

Count Sachio made no answer to her biting words. In truth, matters had not gone so well with him as he would have liked. He had been ordered to report to his own king, and now must soon make that report, and certainly he could not tell of the unequalled success which he had so confidently hoped. He had not yet secured possession of both halves of the coveted Gretzhoffen coin. So all through the long and weary journey across the open plain he for the most time retained a moody silence, wondering perhaps what should be his policy when he had brought his new-captured tartar before the king.

Arrived at the capital of Grahoffen, Kitty was allowed small time to arrange her toilet or compose herself after the fatigue of the journey. Very presently she was brought before King Cortislaw himself.

She found him an old man, thin, wrinkled, crabbed, irritable, excitable.

Cortislaw regarded the young girl steadily as she stood before him.

"So this is the woman?" he demanded of Count Sachio, who stood humbly by.

"The same, your majesty. She can explain what you desire to know."

The king looked intently at something he held in his hand. Kitty caught sight of it—it was the half coin which she had once possessed, which had been taken from her but lately by these men. Evidently Count Sachio had turned it over forthwith to his royal possessor.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "tell me what it says. The inscription is broken. I wish to know it all. I am informed that you have seen both halves of this coin, and therefore know the entire message. Read it to me at once."

Kitty took the coin in her hand as though to study it, but swiftly put her own hand behind her back as she clutched it.

"It is my property," said she stoutly. "Not even a king can take away property without course of law."

Even a king was astonished at the effrontery of the young girl—who held her possession until two sturdy guards forced the coin from her hand. The king smiled at her, a somewhat toothless smile.

"So you value it? Many do. We are willing to pay for what we have, mademoiselle—and the message of this coin we mean to have. Give it to us, and you shall be set free."

"Your majesty is liberal—you offer what is already mine—the right to liberty. But what you ask is impossible for me. True, I have seen each half of the coin—even I saw both halves at one time—but never have I read the entire inscription."

"But you have seen both halves," went on Cortislaw. "Tell me, what was on the other half?"

"Your majesty, I cannot—I do not know."

"By the saints of our forefathers," exclaimed Cortislaw, "if this were in the olden days the torture chamber should show you something. But now—"

"The torture could wring only deception from me, your majesty, and that deception would be of no service to you. I have told you the truth—and that alone can serve you. Give me my liberty again—and then perhaps I might learn more of the other half of the coin."

"The girl argues well," said Cortislaw. "I am not sure whether or not she speaks truth, but her argument goes to the same thing in either case. Let her go under guard—perhaps something may arise to give us further insight into this."

"As for you, Count Sachio, you have not yet succeeded in what was asked of you—you have not yet taught us where lies the hidden treasure of Gretzhoffen!"

"Your majesty," replied the count, reddening. "It is but inadvertence, which shall be amended. In my zeal I fancied your majesty would rather have this young woman than to have the other half of the coin. To secure that may require yet more time."

The king fixed on him the cold smile which his courtiers had learned to dread, yet he could not fail to see the shrewdness of Sachio's reply.

"At least guard her, then," said he dryly. "She shall be our guest until we learn more of what she knows. It means too much to forego the full reading of that coin these days. I mean to have it. I trust all my officers will realize that fact."

"Mademoiselle," said Sachio to Kitty, later, when she had been withdrawn to quarters which virtually were to prove a prison to her, "you have heard what the king has said—he will allow you to return to your own country unharmed if

you but help him to the meaning of that inscription. What is it to you? It is only idle curiosity brings you hither. With us it may mean the life or death of our country."

Kitty gave herself up to certain reflections at the time. As to war between the two kingdoms, if it came, why should she aid Grahoffen against the country with which she had become more familiar? Neither had done her much courtesy, true, but for some strange reason her sympathies were not with the country governed by this triscent and unlovely king.

"Think well, mademoiselle," went on Sachio. "It is a long way from here to your country. The coin can mean but little to you at best."

"It may mean much to me," broke out Kitty suddenly. "Listen. This coin is not the property of your king or of that other king. It is the property of the people of these countries. It seeks to tell them its story—not to any king for his self."



The King of Grahoffen Gives Count Sachio 24 Hours in Which to Bring Kitty and the Coin Back.

fish purpose—but it seeks to make known its appeal for justice and liberty. What, think you the people will forever be content to remain a shuttlecock between two?"

A moment later and he had left her once more to her own devices.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### King Michael of Gretzhoffen.

Meantime in Gretzhoffen town the people remained irresolute, uncertain, making no further overt attempt at the long-pending revolution. And as they waited their king amused himself after such fashions as had long been his own. Continually he changed, sometimes hoping, again dreading, and as often as he changed he sent for Count Frederick, on whom he leaned in fatuous confidence.

"But, my dear count," he reproached that gentleman one day, "you have left one errand uncompleted. You have brought us our coin back again, that is true, but the young lady who we fancied would come after it still remains absent from our court. There has been no word from her for many days."

"True, your majesty, she has disappeared, it seems. I do not, myself, know where she is."

"What, you do not?" You have not consulted our wishes in this matter?"

"I am as much distressed as you majesty over the mystery of her disappearance," rejoined the count, and for once he spoke the truth to his king.

"You have made inquiry at her usual place of residence—some hotel, was it not. An absurd thing, for such a woman as herself to live in a hotel."

"At her hotel," replied Count Frederick, "they know nothing. They tell me that she comes and goes at all hours, and leaves no word as to her return. Nearly two weeks ago she left, and has not yet returned. The management remains perplexed."

"Two weeks—so long as that!" exclaimed Michael. "Then believe me, my dear count, something is wrong—that young woman has come to some hurt. She must be found at once. If she is not brought back to our palace in the next day I shall send out a searching party for her—I will scour the town, if need be."

"There may be many reasons," said Count Frederick, "for her continued absence. Perhaps the business upon which she came is not yet completed. Perhaps her employers have called her away. Perhaps she may have been intimidated by certain obstacles in her way."

"By whom, Count Frederick?"

"Well, she has seemed curious herself regarding the coin. Perhaps she knew somewhat of it."

"So she also has studied this trinket that we gave her? Very well—we meant it to prove of interest."

"Doubtless. But regarding the coin so many threats have been made—"

"Threats? What threats? What do you know of any?"

"Many things come to my ears, your majesty, but I strive to keep them from your own ears so much as may be when I find them unwelcome."

"The most unwelcome thing that could come to us, my dear Frederick, is the absence of this young woman now. Where, think you, may she be?"

"I could not guess, unless perhaps she may have returned to her own country—in which case we shall never see her again, your majesty. We can make examination of the passenger lists of all sailings within the last two weeks. I will look into that. If she has not gone back to her own country, she either remains in this somewhere, or in some other near by."

"You do not mean Grahoffen?"

Count Frederick nodded. "That is what I do mean. In truth, your majesty, there are Grahoffen spies in this city—they were even at your ball. Perhaps they concern themselves with this young lady. Why not? If they suspect that she had part of the coin—and it was easily seen by any that once she did have that part—might they

not undertake to make trouble for their own purposes with her?"

"But what good would come of that?"

Count Frederick saw that his argument had gone too far for his own purposes. He did not care to tell the king all he knew, yet his zeal for Kitty had led him far.

"Much good might come to Grahoffen's war department, your majesty, if they knew our secrets. Perhaps they thought she could give some information."

"But you do not predict trouble between us and our neighbor—you do not mean war?"

regarding it curiously, as though it were the first car she had ever seen in her life—something very far from true. She was only examining its mechanism, so that she might be the better able to carry out the sudden resolution she had formed regarding it.

What the guards, who smilingly regarded her through the windows, saw was a swift leap of the girl to the driver's seat, her rapid movements with the controlling levers as she cut on the spark, gave the car gas, threw in the clutch, threw open the throttle, and drove away, the cut-out muffler roaring her own defiance to pursuit.



Kitty Hides From Count Sachio and the Guards After Her Escape From the Palace.

Hue and cry now through all the halls of Grahoffen palace, and general uproar. Count Sachio, never too far away, was promptly on the spot. When he saw what had happened he cursed the two grenadiers with all his ardent soul. Even the king, himself, aroused from his midday slumber, joined in these scenes of excitement.

"What has happened—what is all this about?" he demanded.

The trembling guards scarcely dared tell him the truth.

"What, she has escaped—that prisoner! She was of more importance than any held here in our own remembrance. You shall all be held to account for this. How now, Count Sachio, did we not give her into your immediate charge?"

"Your majesty, you did. I dare no explanation of her escape. Only—she is gone."

"And with her our only hope of success in the ambitions of this kingdom. You seek to explain that to me? After her, duddard, and bring her back in twenty-four hours—or else do not return. You guess my meaning, Sachio?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Again in Gretzhoffen.

Pursuit? Kitty laughed at the thought as she felt under her the strong pulse of the great machine.

She had taken the driver's seat, and as the car was of the left-hand drive, for the time she had no opportunity to look into the tonneau, had she liked. Listening to the swift purr of the smooth motor, she did not first hear the sound of a chuckling laugh back of her in the car—a chuckle which at length broke out into a hearty gust of laughter.

She turned her eyes swiftly at risk of capsizing the car—and found herself gazing directly into the face of the man whom of all others she would most have preferred to see.

Even now he came crawling across the top of the seat to join her in the front of the car.

"Roleau!" she exclaimed, "is it indeed you? Are you always to be the deus ex machina in all my difficulties—literally you are that now!"

"I do not know what you mean by that, excellency," said Roleau, as he took the steering wheel from her, "but I have been in this machine for some time. I was satisfied that did you escape from the palace you would need a means of getting away. All I needed to do was to wait patiently. So you have come. As soon as I could make my own escape I secured this car—a good one—and I followed. It was very simple, as you see."

"At least a near squeak this time, Roleau," said Kitty. "They never meant for me to escape."

"They do not mean it now, excellency," said Roleau, nodding behind him, where he knew pursuit even now was beginning. "I will drive now as I have never driven before. 'Tis a sweet engine, and it rides well. They will drive fast who follow us."

All of which was so literally true that before long the desert miles once more had sped beneath them and Kitty found herself again in the city she was more than ever disposed to call her home. They found entrance to the Ritz hotel at the rear door, in view of their own travel-stained condition.

"Excellency," said the grieved and pained clerk, when at length she made her way to the desk, "I was on the point of removing your belongings and making other arrangements for your apartments."

"By what right?" demanded Kitty. "They are paid for in advance—why should they not be ready for me when I come?"

"But we did not hear when you would return?" "There are many things one does not hear—perhaps you may hear very little of my own business and my plans. I pay for service here. Please care for me, therefore, and my man—we both are tired."

"You have been inquired for in your absence, excellency. The Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen—"

"Indeed, and what could he want?"

"He has been here twice, excellency. But yes—"

terday he came the last time. He said he came on message of the king—which gave me warrant for what he asked."

"And what was that?"

"Access to your apartments. He said it was the command of the king."

"And you dared give him such access?" "We dared not do less, excellency. He was most courteous in one way—asked many questions regarding yourself, but as to search of your apartments he made none, or next to none. He seemed to care for nothing that he saw, save one little picture, a portrait."

Kitty remained but briefly in her own rooms. She took a swift glance about. Everything seemed in place, much as she had left it—no search apparently had been made of any of the cabinets or drawers. There had been a little picture—one of herself—left on the dressing table. It was gone! She missed nothing else.

CHAPTER XXXV.

In the Name of the King.

It was plain enough to Count Sachio which way Kitty would head in her fight. Her car was little more than out of sight on the Gretzhoffen road ere Sachio himself was in pursuit.

Count Sachio himself was no blunderer, and no common thief chaser, but a courtier and a man of intelligence. He knew it would be futile to make a direct demand of the hotel management regarding the whereabouts of the young American. Therefore, while he himself approached the hotel desk to engage the clerks in conversation, he sent two of his own men—one of them Bartel, the spy, who had been established here so long—by way of a rear stairway to find Kitty's rooms and report to him what they learned.

He stood for some time making polite speeches with the desk men and the porters, asking for certain information as to routes and distances, but all the time burning with impatience that he heard no report from his messengers. As he stood, there came news of them—startling news enough. There came shrieking down the stairs, incoherent, babbling, a maid who called out to the clerk, or to any who would hear her!

"A man," she cried—"A man—killed in her room—the young American's room—murdered—it is murder, I tell you!"

The officials of the hotel took prompt action. "Close all the doors," ordered the porter. "Clear the corridors at once, in the king's name. Apprehend the murderer whoever it may be. Have the gendarmes come at once. You, boy—run I say."

It was hue and cry once more, and Sachio was glad enough that his own alibi was plain, for he knew not what now might happen. One of his men rejoined him—the spy Bartel. The other remained behind—his fate unknown as yet.

As for Kitty, she was at this moment once more away from her hotel and once more in the stately palace of Count Frederick.

She entered softly, leaving Roleau as usual somewhat remote, to guard against any sudden intrusion. Once more she cast about a searching gaze upon the details of the place. All its disorder had been removed. Spick and span in military neatness the apartment lay before her.

Upon the dresser, in full view, openly displayed, was a picture in a little frame—a frame of silver set in brilliant gems. She looked at it suddenly—it was the portrait of herself which once had stood on her own dressing table in her hotel! Now it was here. Why? Kitty felt a strange flush come to her face.

Something now arrested her—she paused, reluctant to resume a search which ever had been distasteful to her. No, she would not touch a thing—had he not been more respectful than herself of another's privacy? If he had taken anything from her apartments it was but—this. And apparently he had cherished it. No, she would not search for the coin. She would leave this country disappointed, if need be. But this time at least—with this proof of another's chivalry before her—she would herself be chivalrous.

But there lay, just at the foot of the little portrait, an object which caught her eye. It was the half coin of Gretzhoffen!

Yes, here it was in full view, openly displayed, that any might see it who liked, who chanced to be there. Apparently Count Frederick felt that all pursuit of the coin had ended—that no longer could any intruder gain access to his palace.

Kitty hesitated for a moment. The appeal of the coin came to her once more. She took it up, held it in her hand, gazed at it—and once more, as so often had been the case—she found herself surprised at the very moment of her success.

She heard Count Frederick's quick footsteps, his calm voice behind her.

"Mademoiselle, again!"

The count stood there regarding her.

"Evidently, mademoiselle, you did not realize that these repeated visits rendered necessary the installation of an electric system of my own devising—you see, I knew of your presence, and as you see, I have come. You rang. Of what service can I be, mademoiselle?"

"Leave me alone," panted Kitty, her face hot, tears almost in her eyes. "I hate you! I hate you!"

"I grieve at that, mademoiselle," said Count Frederick evenly. "I wish I could say the same of you—but I cannot. With every reason to distrust you—I cannot. Continually we cross swords, do we not? And you were easy to deceive this time. See—you are trapped as simply as a bird which steps into its cage without hesitation."

"Will you not give me back my coin, mademoiselle? Will you not assist me in reading the message of the coin, so that we may make an end of all this—so that we may not continually cross swords with one another?"

In answer Kitty darted past him, found her way into the hall, ran she knew not where. Before her lay a little narrow stairway, and she sprang up it, hoping to find egress somewhere. Alas! the door that closed the head of the stair was locked. She heard his low laugh as an iron grille snapped across the opening, cutting off escape.

"Won't you give it me now—my coin?" he asked. Silence reigned in the great white marble palace of Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen.

And now, far off in other parts of the city, where men sought one who had done a crime, there rose in the streets the sound of hurrying feet, with the warning cry, "In the name of the king!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)